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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

THE ORIGIN OF SACRIFICE

This difficult question is treated in two books recently published. The first¹ is by an Assyriologist already known by his studies in demonology. The author appears to maintain that religious institutions have been molded by belief in evil spirits rather than by faith in good divinities. He directly asserts it of the rite which he calls the atoning sacrifice, and which he sharply distinguishes from the burnt-offering. As to the sin-offering he says in so many words: "The priest first of all inveigled or drove out the demon from the sick man into a wax figure or slaughtered kid and was then able to destroy it" (p. xii).

It is not difficult to show that the belief in evil spirits has existed in the East from the earliest times and still exists there. The evidence which the author marshals on this head is drawn from a great variety of sources, some of them well known to all students of the subject. For Hebrew antiquity direct evidence is scanty, but there is no reason to suppose that the common people in Israel differed much from their neighbors. Spooks and goblins swarmed in their world. *Incubi* and *succubae* were perhaps as familiar to Hebrew antiquity as to mediaeval Europe. Cripples and abortions were the result of demonic lust, as the *nephilim* sprang from the marriage of angels with the daughters of Adam. Disease was demonic in origin and the healing art consisted in exorcism.

All this is familiar to us. The specific question which interests us comes into view when we consider the connection of sin and disease. Is every case of sickness the result of sin? If so is it because the sin is a breach of taboo, putting the transgressor into the demon's power? Or is the sickness a direct act of God, punishment for a crime? The Hebrew authors nowhere tell us clearly, perhaps because the matter was so clear to them. The prominence given to unwitting sins (which, of course, are not sins in our sense of the word) in the Levitical legislation and the treatment there accorded them favor the view that they were breaches of taboo.

Mr. Thompson properly points out that the Babylonian theory of unwitting sins is the same as the Hebrew. The sources of contagion—dead bodies, women in childbed, and the others—are the same in the

¹ *Semitic Magic, Its Origins and Development*. By R. Campbell Thompson, M.A. (Cantab.). London: Luzac's Oriental Series, 1908. lxviii + 286 pages. \$2.50.

Babylonian tablets as in the Pentateuch. Contact with any of them was defilement. The incantations which have come down to us show that a man taken ill attributed his affliction to unwitting defilement of this kind and that he inquired anxiously wherein he had transgressed. The priest was supposed to have power to banish the demon through the help of a beneficent deity. In this respect the parallel with Hebrew liturgy is not exact, for the ritual which cleanses the leper is not an incantation for the cure of his disease; it prescribes the method in which *when cured* the man may be admitted to the community of worshipers.

Supposing, however, in default of evidence, that the treatment of disease was the same among the Hebrews as in Babylonia does it follow that the sin-offering was simply a rite of exorcism? Mr. Thompson's theory is that the demon of disease was conjured into the slaughtered animal, carried away, and destroyed. In this sense the animal was a real substitute for the man. The Babylonian theory is attested by direct assertions of the tablets. The Hebrew parallel of the scapegoat and of the bird let loose in the cleansing of the leper will occur to everyone. Are these fair examples of the primitive sin-offering? It would be rash to assert it. For the striking thing about these "cathartic" offerings is that they are not sacrificed. The essential thing about the sin-offering is that its blood must be shed at the altar.

It is not probable therefore that the sin-offering took its rise in exorcism. Mr. Thompson's theory fails us when we attempt to explain the use of the blood. He makes an attempt at explanation in the following words:

The "blood" question is, I think, to be explained thus: If we go back to the most primitive ideas, dissociating our views from the later (and probably corrupt) customs of the Old Testament, we find that the magician has to inveigle the demon out of the sick person into the substitute. Since he knows that the evil spirits are particularly attracted by blood he cuts the throat of the beast which is to be the receptacle of the demoniac influence (p. 195).

But this ignores the most important fact that in the Hebrew ritual the blood is sprinkled on the altar or even in the inner sanctuary where of course the demon could have no place. Mr. Thompson's theory therefore breaks down at a vital point. Limited space forbids further discussion of many things of interest suggested by his book.

The second work is the joint production of two French scholars² whose

² *Mélanges d'histoire des religions*. Par H. Hubert et M. Mauss. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1909. xlii + 236 pages. Of the essays here republished the "Essai sur la nature et la fonction sociale du sacrifice" first appeared in the *Année sociologique*. Vol. II (1897-98).

collaboration in the department of sociology has already shown important results. Their inquiry into the nature and function of sacrifice begins with a note of dissent. Giving due credit to W. Robertson Smith and J. G. Frazer for their investigations the authors yet find the theories of the English school inadequate. The totemic sacrament—that is, the slaying of an animal regarded as divine in order that the community may partake of the divine life—does not seem to MM. Hubert and Mauss to be a sacrifice at all. It lacks just the element of oblation which is an essential feature in what we know as sacrifice. To put it succinctly: sacrifice of a god is not sacrifice *to* a god, and it is the latter which as an almost universal institution is of prime interest to the investigator.

To explain sacrifice (that is, sacrifice to a god) our authors have recourse to the fundamental conception of sacred and profane. Their thesis is: *Sacrifice is a means by which the profane attains communion with the sacred.* For proof they rely upon two widely separated liturgical literatures, the Hindoo and the Hebrew. The choice of these two is explained by the fact that these are the only ancient liturgical monuments which have come down to us in anything like completeness. If it be objected that modern criticism shows the Pentateuch not to be very ancient, the reply is that the antiquity of the rite is certain, no matter when the documents were written. The division of things and persons into sacred and profane is in fact one of the most constant phenomena in the history of religion.

The act which removes a person or thing from the profane to the sacred class is consecration, and consecration lies at the basis of the whole Hindoo liturgy:

Sacrifice is a religious act which can be performed only in a religious environment and by religious agents. Before the ceremony neither the offerer, nor the priest, nor the place, nor the victim has this character in the proper degree. The first phase of the sacrificial service is designed to give it. They are profane and must change their state. Certain ceremonies are therefore necessary to introduce them into the sphere of sanctity. . . . This is what constitutes, adopting the expression of the Sanscrit texts, *entrance on the sacrifice* (p. 23).

To verify this statement one of the most elaborate sacrifices is described in detail. We see how the offerer (not the priest, but the man who furnishes the victim, and in whose interest the rite is performed) undergoes a long initiation which (as the texts assert) elevates him to the sphere of the divine. The place of sacrifice is consecrated by rites equally complex. Within the sacred area there are degrees of sanctity, the highest being possessed by the sacrificial stake. The victim is sacred by nature, belonging to a sacred species, but it must receive an additional consecration by lustration and

unction. In this way its religious quality is so intensified that when it is tied to the sacred stake the priest must not touch it with naked hands. The sanctity of the implements employed is indicated by the fact that after the ceremony they are destroyed or else carefully deconsecrated before being put to common use. The persons who take part also are deconsecrated before entering on their ordinary life.

The authors of this treatise believe that the Hebrew sacrifices are fundamentally similar to the Hindoo. Their theory of the sin-offering is exactly opposed to the one advocated by Mr. Thompson. The latter thinks the kid which is slain is simply a *corpus vile* into which the demon may be enticed or conjured, so as to free a man from disease (or guilt which has brought the disease). The French investigators believe the animal victim to be a sacred thing whose sanctity passes over to the man for whom it is offered and obliterates his guilt (guilt in the ritual sense). At the same time they think that in the case of the scapegoat, the bird of the leper, and the sin-offering burnt outside the camp, the impurity is carried away by the victim, as though there had been an exchange of its sanctity for the opposite taboo (pp. 74-78).

The French authors seem to me to be correct in emphasizing the consecratory features of the rite. The central feature in the Hebrew sin-offerings is the use of the blood. This mysterious fluid partakes of the quality of sanctity in a high degree. It is the portion of the divinity; it is sprinkled on the altar or poured at its base; it is applied even to the inmost sanctuary; it consecrates priests and implements; it purifies the leper. It could not be effective in all these cases unless it were sacred and imparted sacredness to others. Hence its power to restore to communion the one excluded for defilement, for this is what the sin-offering effects. The Hindoo ritual is more elaborately developed than the Hebrew, but the underlying idea must be the same. The Hebrews had no need to consecrate a place for the ceremony, because the temple was permanently sacred and its fire was constantly burning. The sanctity of the place was such that we may suppose the victim to be made sacred by its presence there—it already belonged to a special class of clean (that is, sacred) animals; its unblemished physical character showed that it was under no hostile taboo. In these respects the Hebrew sacrifice conveys the same idea as the Hindoo. The conclusion is obvious: the sin-offering is effective in that, being sacred, it conveys sacredness to the man on whose behalf it is offered, and thus restores him to the communion of Yahweh.

The question remains: When the sanctity of the victim thus passes over to the offerer, does the defilement of the latter infect the victim so

that it must be destroyed? The scapegoat has already been alluded to and it is expressly said to carry away the sins of the people. But the scapegoat was not a sin-offering: its blood was not brought to the altar. If an offering at all it was an offering to Azazel who received it, blood and all, in his wilderness home. The regular sin-offerings were sacred, the flesh of some of them was eaten by the priests. It does not seem that this could have been done had they been infected by uncleanness. The Hebrew authorities themselves were not altogether clear in their own minds about the proper disposition of other sin-offerings, for we read of a dispute between Moses and Aaron on this point (Lev. 10:16-20). Had there been a clear tradition of demonic taboo passing into the flesh there could have been no such debate. We are naturally led to think that in the cases where the flesh was burned outside the camp this was because it was too sacred even to be eaten by the priests. In this case parallel with the Hindoo rite would again be obvious, for at the conclusion of that rite, as we have seen, the implements must be destroyed or deconsecrated. The central point in the sin-offering was the sprinkling of the blood. When this was accomplished the flesh which was left over must be destroyed, not because it was unclean, but because it was too sacred to be used in any way.

Enough has been said to show that the books before us deserve the careful attention of students.

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OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

Mr. Cook's suggestive *Notes*¹ originally appeared in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, and have grown out of critical studies upon II Samuel. Recognizing "that many of the older narratives that have gathered around the first king of Israel were not trustworthy, and that in their present form they are the result of certain processes of redaction," the author has endeavored to find definite indications of the various stages in the development of the traditions. Such effort inevitably involved a further analysis of older epochs.

Mr. Cook thinks the Davidic stories and those of Saul show points of contact with the Joshua cycle: so much so that he seems disposed to question the existence of such a person as Joshua, and to conclude that he is a sort of collated character—like the Greek tale of Sesostris in Egypt.

¹ *Critical Notes on Old Testament History*. By S. A. Cook. London and New York: Macmillan, 1907. xviii + 160 pages. 3s. 6d.